Selecting, Storing, and Serving Ohio Tomatoes

Is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable? Tomatoes are cultivated and used as a vegetable. Botanically, they are a fruit, being fleshy and containing many seeds that are not stones. Regardless of how you classify them, they remain an Ohio favorite because of their versatility and flavor.

Selection
- Tomatoes can be red, orange, orange-pink, purple, or yellow when ripe, depending on the variety.
- Sizes range from the very small cherry tomato to oval or pear shaped (used for tomato sauce or paste) to giant “beefsteak” type used for slicing.
- Select tomatoes that are firm, glossy, smooth, and plump. Avoid those that are soft, bruised, cracked, or otherwise damaged.
- Purchase tomatoes at various stages of ripeness, and then use the ripest tomatoes first. Examine the color. Those tomatoes that are the deepest in color are the ripest.
- Always remember, tomatoes can ripen after picking.
- For information on tomato varieties and uses, contact your local OSU Extension office.

Storage
- Ripen tomatoes at room temperature (70 degrees F) with the smooth end down and stem end up. The bumpy “shoulders” of the stem end are the tenderest parts of the tomato and will bruise simply by the weight of the fruit.
- Sunlight is not necessary to ripen fruit, and placing tomatoes in the window is not recommended. They could become overheated, which prevents good color and flavor development and increases the chance of decay.
- Do not place tomatoes in the refrigerator unless they are fully ripened. Damage often occurs at temperatures below 55 degrees F and tomatoes will not ripen any further in the refrigerator.
- Once tomatoes are fully ripe, they should be stored in a cool area at 55–58 degrees F. An excess of fully ripe tomatoes may be stored in the refrigerator for two to three weeks. They will lose some color and flavor, but will still be good to eat.
- Any excess of partially ripened tomatoes should be fully ripened at room temperature before storage in the refrigerator. Ripening at room temperature after storage in the refrigerator is not practical and may result in soft tomatoes with a watery consistency.
- If tomatoes are harder when bought than desired for eating, they will not soften as quickly in the refrigerator as they will at room temperature. The rate of softening is only slowed, not stopped, at refrigerator temperatures.

Nutrition
One medium tomato has only 35 calories, is rich in vitamins C and A, and contains small amounts of the B vitamins and potassium. Tomatoes are also associated with lower risk of heart disease and certain cancers because they contain phytonutrients like lycopene.
Phytonutrients are tiny chemicals found naturally in plants that help protect the body against chronic diseases. In one study, men who ate two or more servings of tomato products a week averaged a 35 percent reduction in prostate cancer risk.

**Yield**

Due to the many variables, such as moisture content, size, and variety, it is impossible to give specific recommendations for quantities to buy. The recommendations below are approximations only.

- 1 bushel of tomatoes = 53 to 56 pounds
- 1 pound of tomatoes = about 3 medium tomatoes

**Serving Ideas**

- If your recipe calls for peeled and/or seeded tomatoes, hold in boiling water for 30 seconds, plunge into cold water, drain, make a slit in the blossom end and peel skins back.
- Seed by cutting the tomato in half crosswise and remove seeds with the tip of a knife or spoon.
- Slice tomatoes the French way, from stem to blossom and in this way they lose less juice.
- Top with fresh or dried herbs, such as basil, oregano, tarragon, thyme, or curry powder.
- Stuff large tomatoes with a variety of mixtures such as fish, poultry, egg salad, or cottage cheese.
- Stuff cherry tomatoes for bite-size appetizers. To prepare, slice off tops and a very thin slice off the bottom, so they will stand well. Remove seeds and juice with a melon scoop. Stuff with your favorite fillings—cream cheese and watercress; tuna and mayonnaise; pulverized peanuts, mayonnaise, and curry powder; or avocado, minced onion, and lemon juice.
- For an elegant salad or appetizer, layer sliced tomatoes, fresh basil leaves, and fresh mozzarella cheese on lettuce. Dress lightly with olive oil.
- Tomatoes get better and better tasting as you cook them. They are great in entrees that cook a long time or require next day “reheating.”

### Ohio Fresh Gazpacho

1 cup chopped peeled tomato  
½ cup chopped celery  
½ cup chopped cucumber  
½ cup chopped green pepper  
½ cup chopped green onion  
2 teaspoons snipped parsley  
1 clove minced garlic  
3 tablespoons wine vinegar  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon pepper  
½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce  
2½ cups tomato juice

Chop ingredients in food processor. Chill in glass or stainless steel bowl at least 4 hours.

*Serves 6–8.*

For information on preserving tomatoes and tomato products, contact your local OSU Extension office for the following fact sheets:

- **Drying Fruits and Vegetables, HYG-5347-09**
- **Safe Handling of Fruits and Vegetables, HYG-5353-09**
- **Freezing Vegetables, HYG-5333-09**
- **Canning Tomatoes, HYG-5336-09**
- **Canning Tomato Products, HYG-5337-09**


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